



## COVID-19 Virtual Forum with State Legislators

Friday, April 10, 10 – 11am

**Senator Anne Gobi**

(617) 722-2210 / (508) 981-5655

**Representative Jonathan Zlotnik**

District Office: (978) 410-9559



### Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce

Website: <https://gardnerma.com>

Resources for Business Owners & Managers: <https://gardnerma.com/covid19resources/>

ALL BUSINESSES can reach out to the Chamber with any questions at (978) 632-1780 or [Chamber@gardnerma.com](mailto:Chamber@gardnerma.com).

### North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce

Website: <https://www.northquabbinchamber.com>

Emergency Resources: <https://www.northquabbinchamber.com/emergency-resources>  
ALL BUSINESSES can reach out to the Chamber with any questions at (978) 249 –3849 or [info@northquabbinchamber.com](mailto:info@northquabbinchamber.com).

### *Question & Answer Summary*

1. *Question: Trevor Beaugard, Director, City of Gardner, Community Planning & Development:*

The entitlement communities in Worcester County have received funding from HUD for some small business assistance programs.

Do you have any idea when the block of money will be funneled through DHCD for other communities like Gardner, that's a mini entitlement, and other smaller communities that actually apply for the funding competitively?

We do have a large small business base in the downtown and surrounding area that is going to be in need of funding in the very near future. I don't know how quickly that money is going to be available.

*Answer: Senator Anne Gobi & Representative Jonathan Zlotnik*

Senator Gobi & Representative Zlotnik will bring up this question to Congresswoman Lori Trahan in an upcoming conference call and report back.

2. *Question: Rebecca Bialecki, Chair, Board of Selectman, Town of Athol*

I'd like to really focus on how we move forward. I don't think that at any point, we're going to hit a magic date where everything just suddenly reopens as it was. I think we have to focus on: how do we reopen in phases or layers, and how to do the work we all do now and look at working differently.

Out here, we have so many small towns that don't have broadband access. We know internet is an essential utility at this point. I'd like to hear your thoughts about moving forward and some supports and an approach to reopening things in a way that makes sense and still keeps people safe and healthy.

*Answer: Senator Anne Gobi*

The Governor has stated that there will be the most amount of caution moving forward because, yes, it's not going to be a snap of the fingers and everything's open and we're all back to normal.

As far as what we're doing as a state: the governor has been making a lot of decisions on this, which is within his purview, and the legislature is doing the best that we can. We're coming out with bills to try to assist people as we move forward through this.

What would you like to see Rebecca?

3. *Follow-up Question: Rebecca Bialecki, Chair, Board of Selectman, Town of Athol*

As we open things, we're going to need to really review and determine best practices. If all our retail establishments need to put up Plexiglas between themselves and the customers at the register, where are small businesses supposed to get that kind of money? Where is some guidance going to come from for those kinds of proactive measures? How are our senior centers going to figure out how to rework their space to make it more amenable to social distancing? One on one appointments with consumers take on a whole new risk.

We are starting to sort of stem the tide with some of those personal protective equipment deliveries now arriving, but we still have lots of folks who have great need. We can't keep up with the demand, and I think there's going to be a need, especially for masks and gloves going forward, for a much longer term than just the Month of April.

*Answer: Senator Anne Gobi*

That's a very good point. You're absolutely right. The world post COVID-19 is not going to look anything like it did pre-COVID-19, there's no question; how we do things within our own family structure to how businesses and schools do things. So that's a very good point. Well taken. Thank you.

4. *Question: Anne-Marie Bouchard, Anne's Bridal & Tux*

As a small business owner with no employees, is there any type of funding or something that we could apply for? I know there's a few businesses in town that don't have employees and we're all struggling.

*Answer: Representative Jonathan Zlotnik*

Yes. I think we'd have to look at the specifics of your situation, just to make sure, but there are certain programs that your business can apply for.

Additionally, as a result of the President's declaration of an unemployment emergency, that opens up the unemployment insurance system to self-employed individuals and 1099 workers, that's also something that you might fit into. Visit [mass.gov \(https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-unemployment-information#self-employed-individuals-and-contract-employees-\)](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-unemployment-information#self-employed-individuals-and-contract-employees-) for more information. There is a specific section on unemployment insurance and self-employed individuals. If you need additional assistance, you can reach out to my office.

5. *Question: Denise Andrews, Legacy Unlimited*

One of my concerns is that our small businesses are not going to reach out and access what they should get. I think our solution is that FRCOG (Franklin Regional Council of Governments) and MRPC (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission) and the planners could work with North Quabbin towns and surrounding towns to really reach out and ensure all small businesses in the area have a helping hand to access the programs. If they need to add staff, perhaps the legislators could get MRPC a part-time paid staff member to make sure our small businesses stay afloat. A real analysis, as detailed as a loss of life on COVID-19, on a loss of business, is extremely important. We cannot afford to lose one small business up here.

*Answer: Representative Jonathan Zlotnik*

I think that point is well taken. My first thought is to partner with Trevor Beauregard, Director, Community Development & Planning for the City of Gardner and Elizabeth Kazinskas, Interim Mayor of Gardner. We can certainly draw a lot of resources to make sure that awareness is there. And also to provide the assistance with technical systems to make sure that people are able to access those funds that the State and Federal government are providing now and in months to come.

*Answer: Glenn Eaton, Executive Director, MRPC*

John Hume, our Planning and Development Director at the MRPC and I have had about four conversations so far with the EDA, the Economic Development Administration, under the

Department of Commerce at the federal level. We have talked to our contact about trying to access the money from the EDA as we are an economic development district (designated in 2003 by the EDA) and we are going to pursue money to do business-impact analysis for the region. There are 11 Regional Planning Agencies in the Commonwealth and two Councils of Government. I want to assume that all our RPAs and COGs are working on this very issue to look at the impact upon the business community, which will ultimately, also through MRPC with the Montachusett Economic Development District, ideally open up more dollars from EDA for all purposes that we can think of. The first step is to get the funding to do business-impact analysis on the region and then go from there. I just thought I'd respond and let you all know we are working on this very hard.

We are also reallocating, with our Board of Directors and Planning Commissioners' support, at the next meeting, our Commonwealth of Massachusetts district local technical assistance funds. That generally funds planning projects master plan, the chapters in the open space and housing production plans, but the reality is, we need to use the DLTA as a resource to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. We will also be using our local technical assistance dollars to pay for the staff. And we're going to submit an amendment to our existing EDA planning contract to open up the doors. Basically, that means that I want to take these three pots of money and pay the staff to work on COVID-19, business-impact analysis, and other economic development issues.

*6. Follow-up Question: Denise Andrews, Legacy Unlimited*

People are reluctant to ask for help, as pride can get in the way. Are there benchmarks and steps in place to walk our businesses, step by step, through the process to get the resources they need?

*Answer: Senator Anne Gobi*

I do have to say that I've been really impressed with the outreach. Not just that the Chambers have been doing, but also the Regional Planning Commissions and the communities and towns themselves. The 28 towns that I represent, when I go on the websites for the communities, I see that they're linking to things. As well as social media, trying to get the word out there, but we can always do more. I know that I've tried to reach out to some of the other social organizations in my communities, whether it's the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, organizations like the Chambers because they're the ones that really connect with their members all the time, to make sure that people are aware of programs because you're right, that's a big part of it. You can have the best programs in the world. But if people don't know that they're there to access, they are no good. And that is on us. Representative Zlotnik and I will take that to heart as well, to make sure that we're doing our part so that no one is forgotten from the smallest home business to the largest business. Thank you.

*Answer: Trevor Beauregard, Director, City of Gardner, Community Development & Planning*

To the point about resources for small businesses: the City of Gardner has an economic development page on the city website (<https://www.gardner-ma.gov/1064/Small-Business-Resources>). We do have links to the SBA programs and the loan programs from the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation.

*Answer: Carol Jacobson, President & CEO, Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce*

Please steer individuals looking for business resources towards The Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce and North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce websites (info listed above). Both websites include COVID-19 resource pages for business owners & managers and community members.

*Additional Feedback: Acting Mayor, City of Gardner, Elizabeth Kazinskas*

I'm not sure that businesses are clear that, even if they're not Chamber Members, they can utilize the resources and information the Chambers are providing. So as much as you can continue to try to make that clear to people, I think that would be helpful as well. Thank you.

*7. Comment - Representative Jonathan Zlotnik:*

The Baker administration has asked us to communicate:

Unfortunately, there are a growing number of COVID-19 related scams and cons that people are falling victim to, I think, out of a sense of desperation. The best way to counter that is with accurate and correct information from official sources as succinctly as possible. Additionally, making sure that those warnings are being communicated.

Closing Remarks:

*Carol Jacobson, President & CEO, Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce*

I want to remind everyone that our Chamber Offices are operating remotely. If you call the Greater Gardner Chamber (978) 632-1780, your call will be routed directly to me. Or email us at [Chamber@gardnerma.com](mailto:Chamber@gardnerma.com).

Please know that we are here for you as a resource. I urge you to check both Chamber's websites for updated information:

- Greater Gardner Chamber: **[Gardnerma.com/covid19resources](https://www.gardnerma.com/covid19resources)**
- North Quabbin Chamber: **[Northquabbinchamber.com/emergency-resources](https://www.northquabbinchamber.com/emergency-resources)**